



Department of Justice

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STAMPEDE RESERVOIR "TREE MURDERER" PLEADS GUILTY

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that JOHN W. CLIFTON, 20, of Truckee and Sierraville, California, pled guilty today to a single count of Depredation of Government Property, a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1361. The guilty plea was entered before United States District Judge John A. Mendez.

This case is the product of an extensive investigation by the United States Forest Service - Lake Tahoe Basin Unit.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Ellen V. Endrizzi, who prosecuted the case, CLIFTON illegally felled at least three and possibly up to 33 mature pine trees that stood on the shoreline of Davies Creek/Stampede Reservoir. The average age of the trees was 100-125 years and the average height was 100 feet. CLIFTON has agreed to pay restitution in the amount of approximately \$70,000 to pay for the loss of all 33 trees and for rehabilitation of the site.

Ron Pugh, Special Agent in Charge, USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region stated, "The Forest Service is very committed to protecting our resources from senseless acts such as this. The cooperation between the United States Attorney's Office and our law enforcement officers and natural resource specialists resulted in a successful prosecution. This felony conviction should serve as a message to others who may be tempted to act in a similar manner." Added United States Attorney McGregor Scott, "The national forests in our region are

rich in natural beauty. This was an utterly senseless crime. The defendant's wanton destruction in this case damaged a protected shoreline and the loss of these mature trees disrupted the natural habitat."

The defendant is scheduled to be sentenced by Judge Mendez on December 2, 2008 at 9:30 a.m. The maximum statutory penalty for this crime is ten years imprisonment, a fine of \$250,000, a three-year term of supervised release, and a special assessment of \$100. The parties have agreed to recommend a sentence of 5 years probation and 500 hours of community service in addition to the \$70,000 in restitution. If the Court does not accept the proposed sentence, CLIFTON will have an opportunity to withdraw his plea of guilty and proceed to trial at a later date.

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